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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problem of language development and language growth in the English-dominant Spanish-speaking student who intends to increase his total command of Spanish for the purpose of functioning in that language at a level equivalent to that of most educated Latin Americans. Observations are based on the experiences of English-dominant Spanish-speaking students wishing to pursue doctoral studies in bilingual education at a southwestern university. Two existing approaches in teaching ethnic students their mother tongue are discussed and compared: (1) the approach emphasizing the teaching of traditional grammar, and (2) the approach which teaches ethnic students the "standard" dialect of their mother tongue. These two methods are compared with a third, namely a total language development program, wherein attention is devoted to increasing oral command of the language, writing, composition, creative use of the language, reading skills, and exposure to topics and domains normally handled by the student in the dominant language. The linguistic characteristics of such English-dominant Spanish-speaking students are described.
(Author/CLK)

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT VERSUS THE TEACHING OF THE STANDARD LANGUAGE

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A short time ago, at the beginning of the 1975-76 academic year to be exact, a medium-sized southwestern university was faced with the following problem: it had received ten fellowships which were to support ten Mexican-American students through doctoral studies in bilingual education. It was assumed that these students would be "Spanish-speaking"; but since interview and selection procedures were typical of these programs in general, it turned out that while these young persons could communicate superficially in Spanish, the majority of them were completely incapable of teaching classes in this language in the variety of subjects which make up the ordinary elementary school curriculum. Several of the fellows felt that they could read in Spanish with some degree of comfort, but most confessed that they could not read at all, could not spell correctly, and very few even dared to attempt a conversation in Spanish on topics of general academic interest.

Very briefly, each one of these doctoral students, veteran teachers of bilingual education programs, were simply English dominant. The question was: What could be done with these students? What methods, courses, etc., were available that would result in the needed fluency for these teachers (all of whom, to the person, were committed to language maintenance programs in bilingual education)? The southwestern university had no answers. The college of education was not equipped to take on such a task and its efforts were limited to teaching a number of "bilingual methods" courses in both English and Spanish. On the other hand, the department of Spanish had not ever before been faced with such a practical problem. Like universities all over the United States, this department was designed around the teaching of Spanish to non-speakers, that is, as a foreign language and around the production of the traditional Spanish major. Courses therefore included: beginning and intermediate Spanish for non-speakers, advanced conversation, advanced grammar and composition, and principally some ten or more courses in Latin American and peninsular literature. The only concession made to the fact that this university was surrounded by native speakers of the Spanish language was a two-semester course (Spanish 213-214) entitled Spanish for Spanish-speaking students, with which Mexican-American students could fulfill their language requirement and not compete with the beginning non-speaking students.

It was evident when faced with the problem of placing the ten doctoral students mentioned above, that there was not even a single course which could provide these students with the overall development in the language which they so desperately needed. The course designed for undergraduate native-speaking students was not at all well-defined. It generally depended on the specific instructor in the course, whether the emphasis would be placed on teaching traditional grammatical terminology, teaching a standard dialect, or the teaching of basic reading and writing skills. At the same time the course in advanced conversation used a text

designed to elicit ordinary speech for traveling, ordering meals, etc., at a level already mastered by all of these doctoral students. The advanced grammar and composition course, on the other hand, was aimed at future teachers of the Spanish language as a foreign language. Thus the emphasis was placed on a review of traditional grammar and on perfecting elementary skills in the area of written Spanish. Indeed it was soon apparent that while many of the courses in literature or even in linguistics would help, they simply were not designed for the task at hand. Everyone agreed that the undergraduate course for native-speakers could be recommended only for those doctoral students who could not read and write at all, but to this day (with a new crop of fellows in the wings) the question is still being pondered.

The purpose of this paper then is to center the attention of the foreign language teaching profession on this problem: the problem of the language development and language growth of the English dominant, Spanish-speaking student who hopes to increase his total command of the Spanish language for the purpose of functioning in that language at a level equivalent to that of most educated Latin Americans. I will therefore examine the two principal existing approaches in teaching ethnic students their mother tongue. I will examine the time-honored emphasis on the teaching of traditional grammar, the new-found interest in teaching ethnic students the "standard" dialect of their mother tongue, and finally I will compare each of these approaches and its results with that of a program in language development which would have as its principal objective the overall growth in proficiency by the student.

The Teaching of Traditional Grammar

Despite recent advances in the theory of language acquisition and generative grammar, etc., for most language teachers the question: "What does it mean to know a language?" is best answered by the time-honored view that to know a language is to know consciously and express verbally exactly how it functions within a system of traditional grammar. Thus, it is not unusual to find that a teacher of the Spanish language will often complain that a fluent native-speaking student of the language in a particular class knows less Spanish than an English-speaking monolingual (with perhaps two semesters' study in the language) simply because the native speaker cannot verbalize exactly how he is using his language. It is not sufficient for the instructor to observe that the native-speaker will never confuse ser and estar, always observes the rules of verb/subject agreement, noun/adjective agreement, etc. If the native speaker cannot list the rules verbatim, he is told that he does not know his language. In many cases instructors go so far as to say that third-semester English monolinguals studying Spanish will "write" more competently than Spanish-speaking students in the same class. When questioned further it turns out that the elaborateness of well-formed sentences produced by the Spanish-speaking students cannot be matched by the former group, it is only that "writing" to some instructors means spelling and not composition. Thus, when faced with designing a course for these Spanish-speaking students, it is not unusual for a department or for a lone instructor, given that responsibility, to decide that what this student needs is a text in traditional grammar which from the very beginning will teach him

what every item in his language is known as to the traditional grammarian. Instruction then is devoted to endless definitions of articles, adjectives, nouns, verbs, etc., and testing involves rote recognition of parts of speech, listings of verb paradigms (which are often clearly a part of these speakers' everyday language) and verbalizations of rules and more rules and exceptions to the exceptions. Whatever writing is done is limited. The student is given little credit for the skills he brings with him, and at the end, success is achieved if these students manage to resemble as far as possible the products of the traditional intermediate courses for non-speakers. Indeed they are well on their way to becoming more and more like all other traditional Spanish "majors," the principal product of such departments.

Unfortunately it does not occur to these instructors or to these departments that while such a grounding in traditional grammar is essential, at this time, for those persons going on to major in the language and perhaps going on to teach traditional grammar themselves, it is of little value for those students who are simply taking a course in order to develop their existing limited skills. If these students can be offered a means by which they can develop their total language skills (speaking, understanding, reading and writing), and in addition to that learn to recognize the niceties of its structure well and good. But if one must choose between learning how to recognize what one does when one uses ser vs estar or the preterite vs the imperfect and being able to read comfortably in the language (due to extended and varied practice,) then the choice is clear. Minority Spanish-speaking students who do not want to be Spanish majors, but who want to maintain and build on their existing skills are not being aided in the process by simply being made to talk about areas in which they never or seldom err. They will and do learn what is taught them--but seen against an entire lifetime, as perhaps the only opportunity to "study" Spanish formally, it can be a tragic waste. Progress will only be made if departments of language will stop looking at each course as having to prepare the student for the courses which follow. In other words, simply because there may be a course in advanced grammar at the junior level, this does not mean that every course at the sophomore level need be taught as if the student were going on to this specific advanced course. Perspective majors can very easily be told which courses must be taken prior to enrolling in the required grammar sequence. Other courses can and must exist which offer students other alternatives.

The Teaching of the Standard Dialect as a Second Dialect

I have mentioned elsewhere (Valdés-Fallis, 1975, 1976) that for some time the foreign language teaching profession has not concerned itself with teaching ethnic students their mother tongue. But even today the newly awakened interest which arose in the wake of the civil rights movement and the current emphasis on cultural pluralism is still largely concerned with correcting the damage that has been done at home. Indeed if the language teacher is concerned at all with the oral proficiency of these students it is only to point out that this oral language is different and therefore inferior to the "standard" dialect of the language. Sadly enough, the precedents already well-established within the English-

profession by Kochman (1974), Sledd (1969, 1972), Shuy (1971, 1973), Stewart (1970), Goodman (1976), and Underwood (1974) concerning second-dialect teaching and dialect eradication have had little or no impact on these departments. Indeed it would seem that the profession, and especially departments of Spanish are laboring under the following delusions (which have already been widely discussed within the English teaching profession):

1. That bidialectalism is a desirable end in itself, in that, in order to be truly quality Spanish-speaking persons, U.S. Hispanos must speak like Spaniards or Latin Americans who have both power and social prestige in their own countries. (In other words they must sound like upper-class Madrileños or Bonaireses.)
2. That it is possible to "teach" a second dialect in a classroom setting. And,
3. That dialect differences are numerous and serious.

I will not repeat here the arguments which I have put forth elsewhere (Valdes-Fallis, 1976) concerning the problems underlying each of the above assumptions. Suffice it to say, that there is no evidence whatsoever that a given dialect is inferior or superior to any other. Prestige comes not from the dialect itself but from the social position of its speakers. In the case of Mexican-American students for example, it is a well known fact that they are not going to enjoy a wide acceptance in Mexico by the upper classes, regardless of what dialect of Spanish they speak. On the other hand, a large number of Mexican citizens and Latin American citizens speak a dialect which (with a few exceptions) is identical to that spoken by U.S. Hispanos. If bidialectalism is desirable, it is not desirable because the native-dialect is unsuitable or inferior. It is desirable because, for the Spanish-speaking student, it can theoretically offer a wider range of experiences in his lifetime.

The arguments put forth by the CCC in its very vital issue entitled "Student's Right to Their Own Language," (1974) are as valid for Spanish and every other minority language as they are for English. Unfortunately it will take some time before members of any of these professions come to realize that edited written language necessarily differs from the spoken language. Indeed instruction must involve teaching the student where written and spoken language differ, but it would seem important for instructors to be aware of the fact that both the prestige variant of a given language and its non-prestige variants differ from the standard edited form.

My own personal objections to making the teaching of the standard dialect as a second dialect the principale thrust of the Spanish-teaching profession in the teaching of U.S. Hispanos has to do with three principal factors:

1. We do not know for a fact that a second dialect can be taught. We know that it can be learned, but up to this point, it has not been demonstrated that it can successfully be taught in a classroom setting. Indeed, both Shuy (1971, 1973) and Stewart

(1969, 1970) have made clear the fact that quasi-foreign language methods can be confusing and ineffectual, simply because bi-dialectalism implies dialect appropriateness and it is difficult to create (in a classroom setting) the various contexts within which each dialect would be considered naturally appropriate.

2. While there has been much talk concerning the importance of self-image to the extent that elementary schools throughout the country are being made aware that to demand English of a non-English-speaking child when he enters school may make him feel that there is something seriously wrong with either himself, his parents, his background, or his language, there has been less talk concerning what happens to, for example, a Chicano student who is very clearly made to feel that his dialect of Spanish is simply not the "right" one. If we are concerned with language maintenance among ethnic minorities (and perhaps that is open to question), then we must be concerned with the fact that minority students do not become convinced that the mother tongue they bring with them is not worth maintaining.
3. Second dialect teaching as a principal thrust within a language teaching program does little to encourage and promote overall growth in the language as a whole. This is not to say that dialect differences would not be mentioned. This simply means that in the same way that a student who learns grammatical terminology exclusively during a semester, the student who learns standard dialect equivalents for each of his "non-standard" forms exclusively has added little to his ability in speaking, understanding reading and writing. With very few exceptions, he is exactly where he was before in terms of functional potential.

In the final section of this paper, I will attempt to further clarify the above point.

Three Instructional Options and the Linguistic Characteristics of the English-Dominant, Spanish-Speaking Bilingual

In this section, I will discuss the two instructional options already mentioned as well as a third option: the total language development program. While I will be using examples from the U.S. Hispano experience, the parallels will be obvious for the teaching of most other "minority" languages in the United States.

Figure I (adapted from Clyne, 1967) represents the relative Spanish and English language proficiency of the English-dominant, Spanish-speaking student. Because of his English-language, public school education, the secondary school-age bilingual is, with very few exceptions, English dominant. His Spanish vocabulary is restricted to the home, neighborhood, and perhaps church domain; while his English vocabulary encompasses his intellectual and abstract thought, his interaction with the majority culture (the working world, the media, etc.). Because he is bilingual, this type of student has a large area of overlap; that is, of vocabulary which the bilingual may have trouble identifying as belonging to only one of his languages. Thus he may use a series of loan words, loan transla-

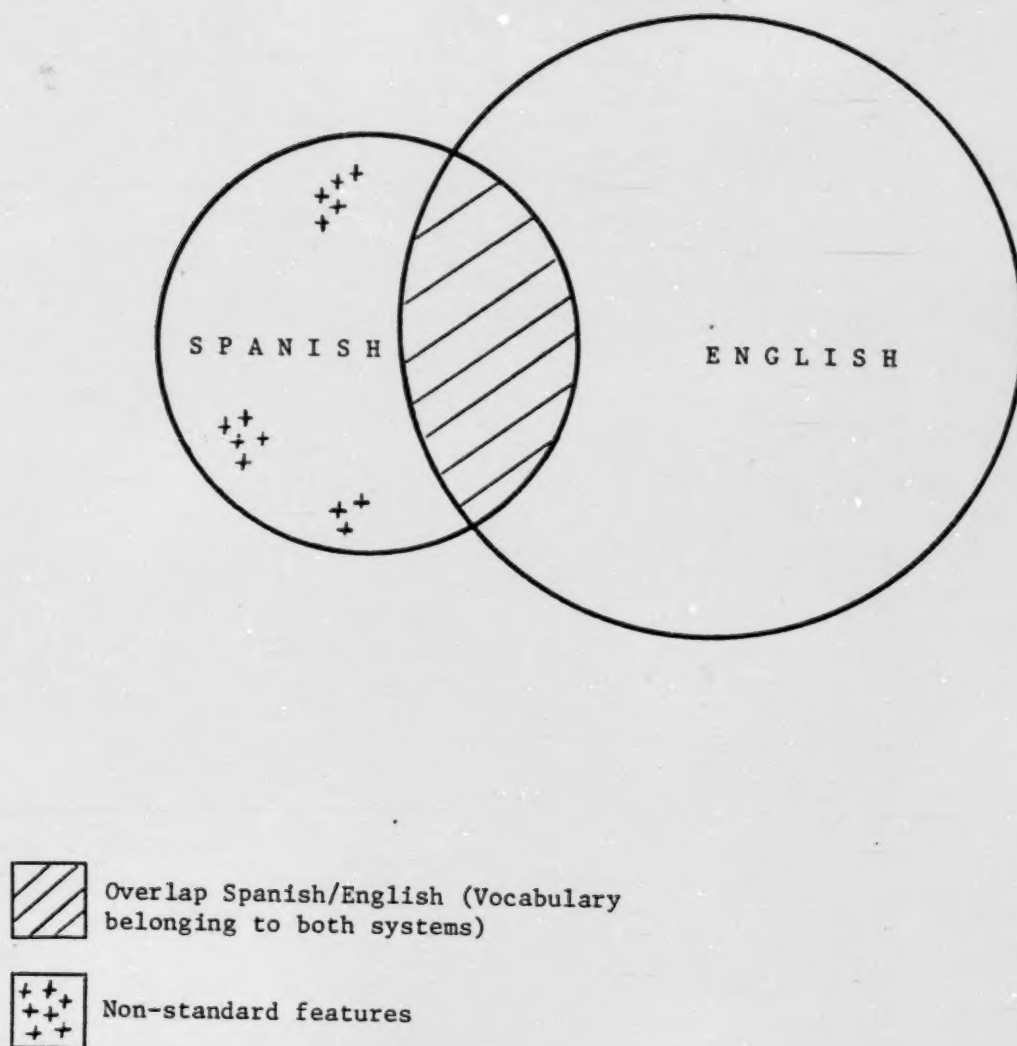


FIGURE I
THE ENGLISH-DOMINANT U.S. BILINGUAL

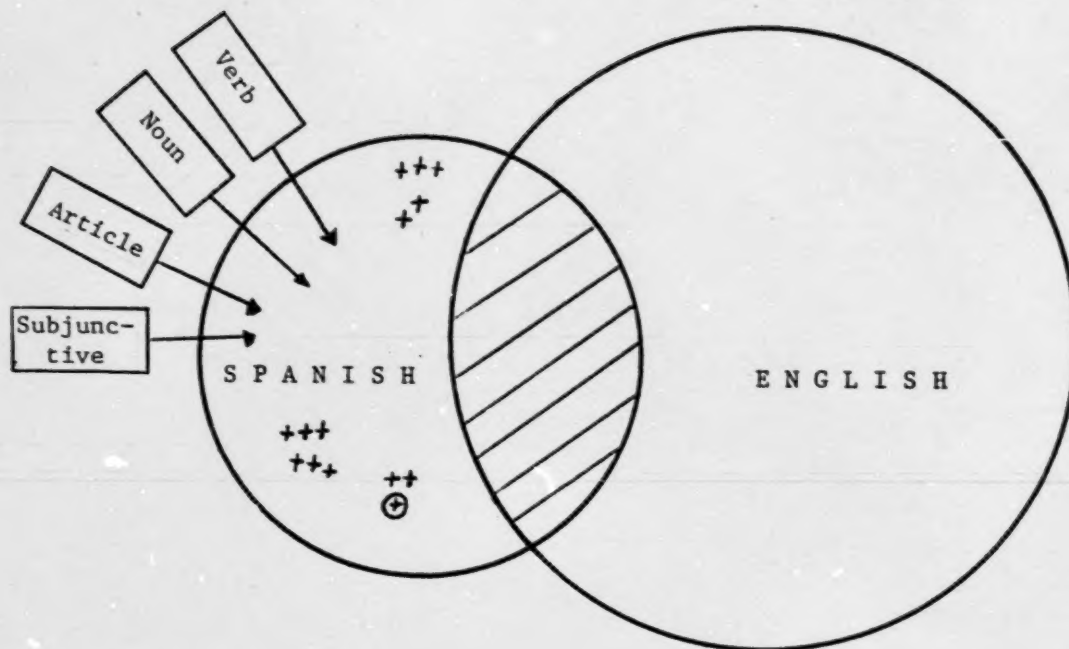
tions, etc., fully convinced that they are truly Spanish items. As a member of a bilingual speech community his Spanish contains a large number of integrated borrowings which are in fact part of the Spanish variant that his community speaks. This contrasts with spontaneous transfer or interference (which is not the norm in his community) but which is characteristic of all persons whose languages are in contact.

In addition, the Spanish dialect or variant of this speaker is characterized by a number of features which are not found in the standard dialect of the Spanish language, that is, in edited written Spanish. It is important to notice, however, that the dialect or variant of this student shares many features with the same standard Spanish. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no one-to-one correspondence between Chicano or Puerto Rican Spanish and written edited Spanish. There are no "non-standard" translations for all standard Spanish sentences, and it is quite impossible to give non-standard equivalences for mathematical, geographical, or sociological terminology. Indeed, depending upon the register in use by a particular Chicano or Puerto Rican speaker, the most formal to the most informal within his own specific variety, most of his utterances may be quite identical with the written edited language.

Figure II represents the first instructional option discussed above, the teaching of traditional grammar. As can be seen in the diagram, the overall proficiency in English and Spanish remains the same. In essence, what the student learns to do is to speak about the Spanish that he already speaks. In many cases he may learn rules for using tenses or moods which may not be characteristic of his spoken dialect at all. Possibly such instruction may make clear to him the fact that certain items (say the radical-changing verbs) are regularized in his dialect and not in the standard. Very clearly then, if one seeks to provide instruction which will provide growth in all areas of the Spanish language experience, such instruction is not an ideal choice.

Instruction which has as its central purpose the eradication or correction of non-standard features as well as the eradication of the items brought about by the overlap of the two languages would resemble that depicted by Figure III. Very obviously the general use of competence in the Spanish language remains the same. Instruction is designed so that the student can identify each and every one of his non-standard features and hopefully remember them long enough to pass an examination at the end of the semester. If the student is fortunate, he will also receive instruction in spelling and reading in addition to tedious explanations based upon traditional grammar. In the best of cases, the above student will be able to take his place among Spanish majors, and teach the language as a foreign language or even as a second dialect, having been well versed in all the current "errors." But seldom will he feel that he has in fact gained much in his overall knowledge and fluency.

It is evident, moreover, that second dialect instruction cannot really help the student guard himself against every incidence of spontaneous interference. Using word lists, drills, etc., such instruction may make some headway against the commonly recognized integrated forms used by such bilingual speakers, but it cannot create two perfect monolingual



Overlap Spanish/English (Vocabulary belonging to both systems)

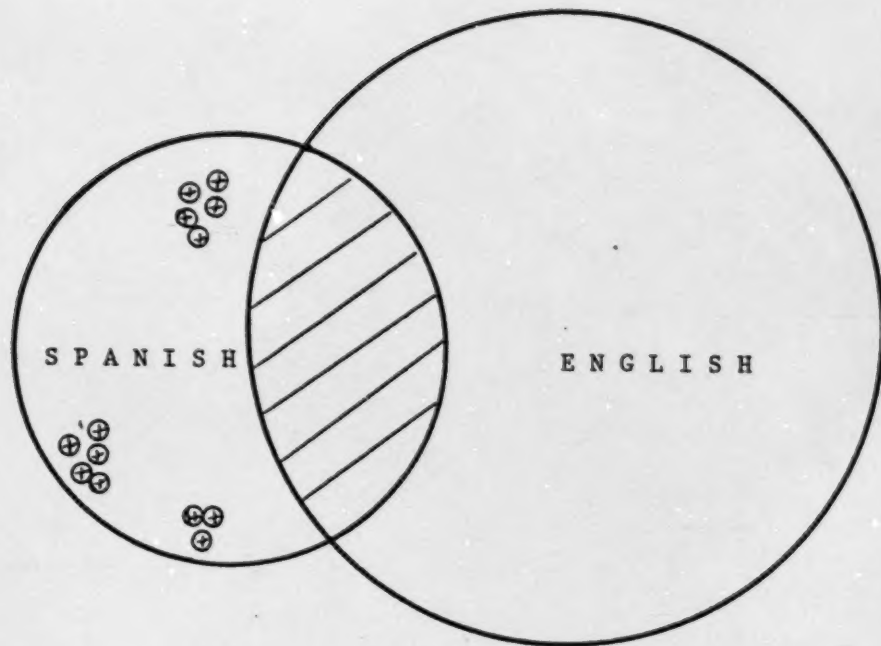


Non-standard features [some may be recognized as such]



Traditional grammar tags [the student can now speak about the language]

FIGURE II
INSTRUCTIONAL OPTION A: THE TEACHING OF TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR



Overlap (Student memorizes long lists of stigmatized "anglicisms"); RESULT: Student guards against integrated forms but cannot guard himself against spontaneous interference



Each type of non-standard feature is analyzed and corrected

FIGURE III
INSTRUCTIONAL OPTION B: TEACHING STANDARD FEATURES FOR ALL NON-STANDARD
FEATURES (TEACHING THE STANDARD DIALECT AS A SECOND DIALECT)

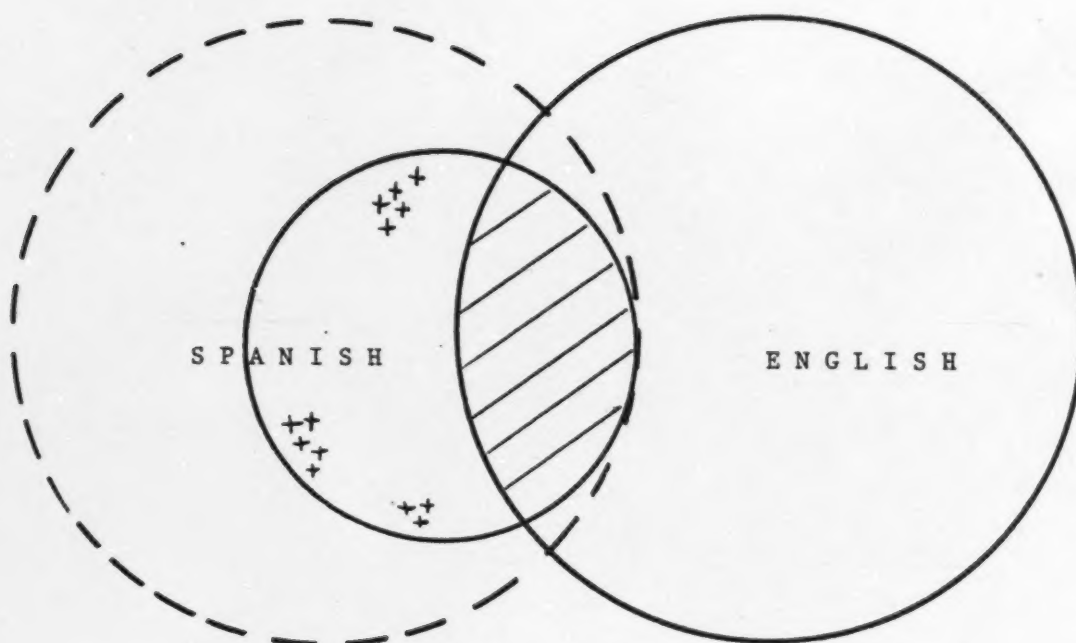
speakers out of a bilingual speaker. His two languages are and will be in contact, and until such time as his weaker language grows and is strengthened to the degree that he is not "at a loss for words" in this language, he will continue to spontaneously create terms when he needs them. Indeed this may and does happen to even so-called "balanced" bilinguals.

In essence then, instruction dedicated to the goals depicted in Figure III seem dubious at best, and for the Spanish-teaching profession to put its eggs into this one basket in the light of what we have learned in the past decade about second dialect teaching is criminally incompetent. For all the beautiful materials we can produce, for all the asinas we may change to así, and the puedmos to podemos, etc., we will not have solved the problem of the bilingual speaker who wants to increase his total command of his first language.

Figure IV represents a third instructional option. Within such instruction the primary objective is the development of the Spanish language to resemble the development of the English language as a whole. Attention is devoted to increasing oral command of the language, to writing (orthography), to composition, to creative use of the language, to reading skills, and to exposure to numerous topics and domains which are normally handled by the student in his dominant language. If non-standard features are mentioned at all, they are mentioned as variants which, while existing in the spoken language, are never written except when consciously imitating such specific speech patterns. Examples of such items are tavía, pa, sía, bia visto, etc. The aim of the instruction as a whole is to develop total command of the first language, including a mastery of edited, written Spanish.

Very obviously, such an aim is a difficult one, and very certainly as inaccessible in the majority of departments of Spanish in the U.S. as it was in the specific southwestern university of which I spoke above. Such instruction would take time, effort, planning, and above all, an individualization of requirements and activities to suit the specific capabilities of each student. For some students, who are simply receptive bilinguals, the process would be long and hard. But for others, a carefully designed program could build upon existing skills and move forward. The questions are: How long would it take? How much would it cost? Who would be qualified for such a program? and What would have to be eliminated in order to bring such instruction about?

I confess that I do not have clear-cut answers to all of these questions. I am convinced, however, that they must be answered. If the profession can be convinced that instruction does not have to begin with remodeling the inner Spanish core of the bilingual student before proceeding to develop the language in general, they will be answered. In past decades, a number of applied linguists have found ways to increase the effectiveness of language training programs for non-speakers. If they have been able to produce competent communicating personnel for various functions, certainly it is not beyond us to produce qualified bilingual teachers who can in fact bring about minority language maintenance in this country. We need only stop to think that there are other reasons for



--- Spanish area expanded to approximate English area
(Growth takes place in speaking, understanding,
reading and writing)



"Anglicisms" are not "corrected." While the overlap area expands, Spanish vocabulary exceeds the vocabulary of the overlap area significantly; Spontaneous interference will continue to occur



Non-standard features are not "corrected"; Standard features far exceed non-standard features; All growth has taken place in the standard language

FIGURE IV
INSTRUCTIONAL OPTION C: DEVELOPING PROFICIENCY TO
APPROXIMATE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

teaching language than those in which we have involved ourselves in the past. We must examine the student before us and his needs and then design our programs and our materials. We cannot continue to insist that students become assembly-line products of an outdated and perhaps irrelevant machine.

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